Unit .23

Session .02

Jesus Teaches About the Cost of Discipleship

Scripture

Luke 9:57-62; 14:25-35

57 As they were traveling on the road someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." **58** Jesus told him, "Foxes have dens, and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." **59** Then he said to another, "Follow me." "Lord," he said, "first let me go bury my father." **60** But he told him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and spread the news of the kingdom of God." **61** Another said, "I will follow you, Lord, but first let me go and say good-bye to those at my house." **62** But Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." … **25** Now great crowds were traveling with him. So he turned and said to them: **26** "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, and even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. **27** Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. **28** "For which of you, wanting to build a tower, doesn't first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? **29** Otherwise, after he has laid the foundation and cannot finish it, all the onlookers will begin to ridicule him, **30** saying, 'This man started to build and wasn't able to finish.' **31** "Or what king, going to war against another king, will not first sit down and decide if he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? **32** If not, while the other is still far off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. **33** In the same way, therefore, every one of you who does not renounce all his possessions cannot be my disciple. **34** "Now, salt is good, but if salt should lose its taste, how will it be made salty? **35** It isn't fit for the soil or for the manure pile; they throw it out. Let anyone who has ears to hear listen."

Intro Options

Main Point:
Discipleship involves a total and costly commitment to following Jesus.

Option 1

Many people complain today that they can't get middle schoolers to commit to anything. Your group is about to change that. They have been hired as consultants for a forthcoming book: How to Get Your Middle Schooler to Commit: A Guide for Parents, Coaches, and Teachers. Your students should submit one of the following aids to this book:

- A list of suggestions or a paragraph to contribute (could be written by one or two people)
- An illustration or comic-like panel (could be made by a student individually)
- An interview with a middle schooler on how to get him or her to commit to something

Once students have prepared their contributions, let them share them with the group. If students have anything to add or to alter to others' contributions, let them do so in a civil manner.

Debrief what commonalities you saw: what makes middle schoolers commit? What makes them hesitant to commit? In today's lesson, we'll see Jesus explain the clear, total, and costly commitment to which Christians are called. How might we see parallels between getting a middle schooler to commit and a Christian to commit?

Option 2

Tell the students you're going to play a short game called, "What Would It Take?" In brief, you're going to give students scenarios; their job is to say what it would take for them to enter those scenarios willingly. For example, what would it take for your students to:

- Get on board a plane right now with no knowledge of the destination?
- Give up interactive technology (phones, computers, gaming consoles) for one month?
- Give up speaking for one week?
- Stay in one room for a month? A year?

See what answers students give. Then, give students some time to come up with their own "What Would It Take?" scenarios. Ask those new scenarios to the students.

Point out that in order for someone to make a commitment, he or she needs to know the cost and the benefit; moreover, he or she considers whether the benefit to be worth the cost. For the "What Would It Take" scenarios, your students probably came up with some big benefits.

In today's lesson, Jesus is going to show that being His disciple requires a clear, total, and costly commitment. Yet we will also see that it's a very worthwhile commitment. What would it take for you to be Jesus' disciple?

TEACHING PLAN

Read Luke 9:57-62.

In this passage, Jesus illustrates to those who wish to follow Him that a verbal claim of His lordship in their lives is not enough. Rather than collecting as many followers as possible to build His Instagram empire, Jesus is actually concerned with the real, heart-deep commitment of His listeners, commitment that leads to true transformation.

Each time someone came to Jesus and pledged to follow Him, Jesus tested their commitment by communicating to them exactly what they were signing up for. They would be living a nomadic lifestyle on their way to Jerusalem. They would have to miss important events in the lives of their families and communities because of their responsibilities to Christ. They would have to look forward without turning back.

Jesus was not in the business of sugar-coating the disciples' commitment. He wanted to be abundantly clear: following Him would be the hardest thing they would ever have done. It would make them face fears they never imagined, it would take them into places they never envisioned, and it would ask of them things that they never thought they'd have to give. He wanted to make sure that those who were clinging to Him weren't just in it for the cool miracles or abundance of loaves and fishes. Jesus wanted to remind them that following Him wasn't just something that they could say—it included things that they must do.

- **How should our verbal commitment to follow Jesus lead to action?**

All three men who claimed to want to follow Jesus in this passage had their hang-ups. Jesus saw that one man needed to hear about how following Him might lead to not even having a place to lay his head. Jesus told another that obedience to His call needed to be immediate, even at the expense of the man burying his father (likely a euphemism for waiting for his father to die so that he might receive his inheritance). He told the third person that following Him meant no turning back, not even to say goodbye to his loved ones.

In order to follow Jesus, these three men had to put Him above all else: comfort, wealth, and family. The people mentioned in this account couldn't choose following Jesus and earthly comfort, following Jesus and earthly wealth, or following Jesus and family—it was Jesus or everything else. This was not a casual commitment, but a life-altering one, and they needed to be clear on the terms before signing on the dotted line. If we want to follow Jesus, we have to be clear that following Him means putting Him above all else. Prioritizing Him rightly is the first step to understanding exactly what we're signing up for.

- **How has following Jesus altered your priorities?**

Read Luke 14:25-27.

The command to honor fathers and mothers is one that Jesus reiterated during His earthly ministry. In Matthew 15:3-9, He rebuked the scribes for commanding that people give money to the temple instead of caring for their parents with the same funds. He told the rich young ruler in Matthew 19 that honoring his father and mother is one of the laws that he must follow to enter the kingdom.

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
Discipleship involves a total and costly commitment to following Jesus.

Luke 9

57-62. "Along the way, Jesus spelt out the cost of discipleship to three would-be disciples who expressed their desire to follow him. He warned the first that, contrary to what many might think, Jesus' way of life was rough (see Matt. 8:19-22). He endured rejection and homelessness, and so would his followers (9:57-58). To the second, Jesus said that no other duty, even waiting to bury a deceased father, is as important and urgent as the commitment to follow Jesus and preach the kingdom of God (9:59-60). To the third, Jesus replied that once a person has decided to follow Jesus, there can be no turning back from his service (9:61-62). In all three cases, Jesus' responses spoke of absolute commitment to him. Christians today are still called to follow him with single-minded devotion."[1]

Luke 14

25-27. Our God is not the author of contradiction or confusion (1 Cor. 14:33), so we must surmise that Jesus is not asking us to dishonor our father and mother after centuries of commanding us to honor the them. He knew the seriousness of the Fifth Commandment; He lived out this seriousness Himself in His earthly life, obeying His earthly parents as a youth (Luke 2:51) and following His heavenly Father's decree by dying on a cross (Phil. 2:5-9). Not only that, but the apostle Paul spends a great deal of space in passages such as Ephesians 5:22–6:9 and Colossians 3:18–4:1 outlining exactly how the other relationships Jesus mentions in this passage—husbands and wives, parents and children—should be conducted. Large chunks of the epistles, which are just as God-breathed as Jesus' words recorded in the Gospels, are devoted to teaching us how to be faithful in our earthly relationships, both familial and spiritual.

99 Essential Doctrines (p. 48, DDG)

Discipleship

Discipleship is a process that takes place both formally and informally to effect spiritual maturity as people follow Jesus. Informal discipleship, as passages like Deuteronomy 6:4-9 suggest, happens everywhere, in every arena of life. Growing in our faith and deepening our walk with Christ is something that requires our whole life, not just the mind. Formal discipleship refers to periods of instruction. We make disciples through our words and actions, providing verbal instruction from God's Word and non-verbal examples through our lives (Acts 20:17-24).

TEACHING PLAN

It should be apparent to us, then, that Jesus used hyperbole in this passage to drive home an important point: our allegiance to Him is so complete that it should even surpass our allegiance to our earthly parents. We should strive to love and respect our earthly relations to the best of our abilities. Yet our love and respect for Jesus should so far outweigh our love toward any other that this respect in turn looks like hatred on comparison. This is radical, yes. And that is exactly the point Jesus is making: our love for Him should be radical.

- **How does your love for Jesus affect and surpass your love for your earthly relationships?**

Read Luke 14:28-35.

In Jesus' illustration, a man set out to build a tower without calculating how much the project would cost. After the foundation was laid he ran out of funds and was completely embarrassed by onlookers who had been watching the project from the start.

In the same way, Jesus is telling His listeners that following Him isn't just something we should wake up one sunny day and decide to do without first stopping to count the cost. It isn't something that we can do halfheartedly; like building the foundation of a huge tower, it isn't something we can just abandon halfway through. To take up our cross and follow Jesus is a lifelong endeavor with eternal significance.

- **What might giving Jesus our total commitment look like at this point in your life?**

Every culture has some notion of a senseless war somewhere in its history. Jesus took this notion and used it to describe the kind of king who avoids unnecessary bloodshed and inevitable defeat by using his common sense to reason his way toward another solution. Following Jesus is not a ploy for earthly renown because to truly follow Jesus is to deny personal glory for ourselves for the eternal glorification of God.

In verses 34-35, Jesus reminds His listeners that His disciples were expected to be salt and light. As we've discussed, our job is to spread the message of the gospel to a dying world, not to become like the world. Our battle is not glorious to those with earthly eyes. Nevertheless, our calculated effort to follow Jesus reflects the glory of our Father in heaven.

- **Why should we reflect on the level of our commitment to Jesus throughout our Christian life? How might doing so encourage us to make our commitment to Him stronger?**

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
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Luke 14

25-27. When Paul teaches husbands how they ought to love their wives in Ephesians, he teaches them that they should love their wives as much as they love their own flesh (Eph. 5:29). When asked what the most important commandment is, Paul's teacher, Jesus, reminds us that the second most important commandment is that we should love our neighbors as much as we love ourselves (Matt. 22:39).

28-35. "Two parabolic illustrations involving building (vv. 28-30) and going to war (vv. 31-32) both warn against making a hasty decision to follow Jesus. Potential disciples must first count the cost to see if they will preserve in the faith (cf. 8:15; 21:19) … if salt has lost its taste. Most salt came from the Dead Sea and contained impurities (carnallite and gypsum). If not processed properly, it would have a poor taste and would be worse than useless, being unusable for food and creating a disposal problem. If the conditions of discipleship (vv. 26-27,33) are not kept, the disciples likewise will become less than worthless (cf. Rev. 3:15-17)."[2]

Activity

Imagine your church is going to do a sermon series or VBS with the theme, "So Worth It." The series will focus on how Jesus calls us to a clear, total, costly commitment as His disciples, but it's a commitment that is "so worth it."

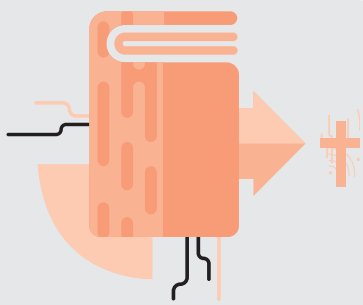
Ask them for some quick verbal examples of times they made big sacrifices or choices that were "so worth it." What did they have to sacrifice or pay? Why would they say that cost was "so worth it"?

Your youth group is in charge of making the promotional materials. Students can make drawings, posters, radio ads (recordings), commercials (skits that would be videoed), memes, table tents, brochures, or whatever else they wish to promote the series. The church staff asks for two things in each piece of advertising: somehow, the promotional material should show that it is indeed a huge commitment to follow Jesus, but it should also show that the commitment is very worthwhile.

Give students time to prepare and share their promotional materials. See what they come up with and debrief it. How did they show that discipleship is a total, costly, and clear commitment? How did they show Jesus makes it more than worth it? How can they show both the totality of discipleship's commitment and also its worthiness in their lives this week?

(p. 50, DDG) ## Christ Connection

Jesus taught that being His disciple comes at a cost. To be His disciple requires a clear and total commitment and will involve sacrifice. When we commit our entire lives to Jesus as His disciples, we emulate the One who laid down His life on our behalf for our salvation.



THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP

Luke 9:57–62, 14:25–35

THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP

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JESUS CONNECTION

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LIFEWISE QUALITY

COMMITMENT – Doing what I say I'll do.

HEAD

What things did people in Jesus' teaching prioritize over Jesus?

What does it mean to "consider the cost" before committing to do something?

HEART

What things do we tend to treat as more important than Jesus?

Jesus was so committed to saving us from sin that He died for us. The call to follow Jesus requires a wholehearted commitment that begins in the heart and changes how we live. He isn't content with a half-hearted commitment, emotional response or promises that we never follow through on. Is a wholehearted commitment to Jesus worth the cost? Why or why not?

HANDS

Choose one of the following options:

1. Jesus told the people that it was important to "count the cost" before they followed Him because there will be sacrifice involved in following Him. Write down 2–3 ways that following Jesus could cost you personally (i.e., losing friends, spending less time on a device, stopping a sinful behavior). Then, write down 2–3 things you would gain from fully committing to follow Jesus. Pray and talk to God about the things on your list. Ask Him to help you be fully committed to Jesus, no matter the cost.

2. Think of a group or organization that you are a part of (school, club, sports team, fine arts group, etc.). Write down some practical ways you can do something to show your commitment to that group. Pick 1–2 actions to follow through within the next week.